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THE STRUGGLE FOR LINGUISTIC SURVIVAL FACING MINORITIES OR SUBJECT NATIONALITIES
A STUDY BASED ON WELSH

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Welsh is a member of the Celtic branch of the Indo-European family of languages. It is the indigenous language of Wales, spoken today by 26% of the population, according to the 1961 Census.[1] This represents a steep drop in the present century, from the 54·4% of the population recorded in the 1891 Census. The language undoubtedly faces a stiff struggle for survival; indeed, the struggle is already going on, and no observer of the contemporary scene in Wales can fail to be struck by the vigour and determination with which friends of the language have begun to marshal their resources on its behalf.

The present state of the language can be shown to be due to a number of causes, the most important being;

(1) that the language lacks official status and recognition in Wales, English being the sole official language.[2]

[1]This does not take into account the number of Welsh speakers in England, which is not inconsiderable.

[2]The language came under official disapproval for the first time in its long history in the so-called Act of Union 1536, actually an act of incorporation in the following provision No. 20:

> Also be it enacted by the Authority aforesaid, That all Justices Commissioners Sheriffs Coroners Escheators Stewards and their Lieutenants, and all other Officers and Ministers of the Law, shall proclaim and keep the Sessions Courts Hundred Leets, Sheriff Courts, and all other Courts in the English Tongue; and all Oaths of Officers Juries and Inquests, and all other Affidavits Verdicts and Wagers of Law, to be given and

(2) that it has been and continues very largely to be discriminated against in the compulsory State system of education that came into being in 1870. The marked decline in the number of Welsh speakers marches with the establishment and development of the State school system, the grammar schools having a particularly black record.

(3) The steady depopulation of the country during the present century, particularly from the areas where the language is strongest. This population drain has been consistently high since the 1914 World War, rising at times to a spectacular level, as it did in the economic depression of the early 1930s during which half a million people were directed from Wales to work in England.

(4) The general malaise, which afflicts long dominated peoples, and which the Welsh people are only now beginning to throw off, with the spread of political nationalism in the present century.

The emergence of Welsh[3] from the older form of the language, known to scholars as British or Brythonic, is believed to have been completed, at latest, by the second half of the sixth century[4] for the earliest surviving poetry in Welsh dates from this period. The

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done in the English Tongue; and also that from henceforth no Person or Persons that use the Welsh Speech or Language shall have or enjoy any Manner Office or Fees within this Realm of England, Wales, or other the King's Dominion, upon Pain of forfeiting the same Offices or Fees, unless he or they use and exercise the English Speech or Language.

The effect of this clause was that advancement to Welsh people was possible henceforth only if they used the English language.

[3]And its sister languages, Cornish and Breton, the latter carried to the Armorican peninsula by British refugees fleeing the Anglo-Saxon invasion between the 5th and 7th centuries.

[4]Kenneth Jackson, *History and Language in Early Britain*, p. 633.

changes involved in the growth and development of this new linguistic entity were profound, transforming British, which seems to have been a synthetic language at the same stage of development as Latin, to which it bore certain striking resemblances in sound system and morphology, into an analytic language of a very different character.

No changes of a comparable magnitude have occurred since; the language has indeed been remarkably stable, so that a sixth century poem can, with some annotation, be made intelligible to an educated modern speaker of Welsh. This stability "makes for tradition, since at no time during the long history of Welsh poetry has any generation been precluded by linguistic difficulties from knowing what past generations have been saying."[5]

From this early time and throughout the period of independence, Welsh was the language of the royal courts and the aristocracy as well as of the common people. Not only was it the language of administration and of everyday life, but it was the instrument of the highest culture of which the Welsh nation is capable. The literary remains of the period in prose and verse are both abundant and of a high order.

This ascendency of the language survived the loss of independence and the disappearance of the royal court in 1282. Welsh remained the language of the aristocracy, who took pride in patronising Welsh literature until the 16th century was under way. Regional differences undoubtedly existed in the spoken language, but throughout the Middle Ages such differences can rarely be detected in the literary language. It is not until the 16th century that dialectal and regional features are reflected in the literary language, a tendency that never got out of hand. This was the century of the Act of Union of England and Wales, 1536, the work of the Tudor monarch, Henry VIII. The Tudors had some Welsh blood in their veins, and the Welsh were very loyal to them, believing they would restore the rights and liberties of Wales. But the Tudors incorporated Wales into the realm of England

[5] *The Oxford Book of Welsh Verse* (Dr. Thomas Parry), p. vii.

and encouraged the Welsh aristocracy to seek preferment at the English court and to educate their sons at the new Tudor Grammar Schools, centres of anglicising influence. They gradually became English in speech and outlook and ceased to patronize Welsh literature. The Welsh language, abandoned to the common people, was in danger of degenerating into a mere patois, and there were fears that it would disappear altogether.

This fate was averted, largely owing to religious influences. The Protestant Reformation in the 18th century which resulted in the translation of the Prayer Book and New Testament (1567) and the whole Bible (1588), the work of 17th century Puritans, and especially the Methodist Revival of the 18th century combined to turn the Welsh into a people who read the Bible extensively, and the language not only survived among the common people but was enriched and revitalized.

That they could read the Bible at all was due to the zeal of religious leaders. It was concern for the people's religious welfare that caused an Anglican clergyman, Griffith Jones of Llanddowror, to attack the problem of illiteracy in the very period of the Methodist Revival. He established Circulating Schools[6] to teach the people to read Welsh, using the Bible as textbook. These schools were singularly successful and when he died in 1764, it was claimed that 158,000 persons had been taught to read in a quarter of a century.

Learning to read Welsh is not difficult, although there is not an exact one-to-one correspondence between phoneme and symbol. For example, there are seven vowel symbols[7] representing thirteen

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[6]So called because the teachers moved from place to place. They would settle in a locality and stayed there long enough to teach those desiring to learn to read the Bible, usually about three months.

[7]Vowel symbols in Welsh are: a, e, i, o, w, u, y. In Northern Welsh, which has a larger vowel inventory than the Southern variety, the first six symbolize two vowel phonemes each, thought of as long and short vowels by Welsh speakers, though the distinction is not purely one of length. u, y, overlap, with both letters each symbolizing two close central vowels with slight lip rounding and y symbolising schwa in addition.

phonemes. This gives two-vowel qualities to each symbol, with an overlap of symbolization between two symbols. But the phonological structure of the language is such that a native speaker can choose the right vowel quality with a high degree of accuracy.

These schools were followed, in the latter part of the century, by Sunday Schools, which became a huge success and were a feature of the religious activity of all the Nonconformist sects[8] during the whole of the 19th century. Both children and adults attended them, and throughout the century, the Sunday School was the only place where the Welshman could learn to read his own language. Their influence was immense, for people attended all their lives, reading and studying the Bible in small discussion groups each under its teacher. It was said of them[9]. " The language cultivated in the Sunday Schools being Welsh....the religious vocabulary of the Welsh language has been enlarged, strengthened and rendered capable of expressing every shade of idea and the great mass of the poorer classes have been trained from childhood in its use. " The decline of the Sunday School and of Welsh Nonconformity in the present century has been a loss to the language.

The form of Welsh acceptable in public utterances is another gift for which the religious life of the country is responsible. Welsh Nonconformity has made the sermon the central part of public worship, and apart from the Sunday Schools, the sermon has been the most important influence on the development and safeguarding of the language. Even now an able preacher can always attract a large congregation. The preachers, drawn from all parts of the country, were under the necessity of finding a spoken medium easily intelligible and acceptable to all. The Bible has been the source

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[8]Welsh Nonconformist sects were all formed by people who left the Anglican Church to establish churches of their own, the older sects, chiefly the Independents and Baptists in Wales, being formed during the 17th century and the Methodists as a result of the Methodist Revival of the 18th century. In the 19th century, the vast majority of the Welsh people belonged to one of the Non-conformist sects which exerted a tremendous influence.

[9]*Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales*, 1847, Vol. III, p. 59.

of Welsh preaching and each sermon is founded on a verse or paragraph of the Bible. This has meant that the preacher has a wide and detailed knowledge of the Welsh Bible, and of the Welsh language in its most majestic form. The oral style evolved by the preachers, therefore, leaned heavily on literary Welsh in syntax and idiom. It is extraordinarily uniform, although reflecting regional differences on the phonetic and phonological levels.

The language evolved for the pulpit is undoubtedly the prestige dialect of Wales, as dialectologists working among the common people soon discover. It is the form to which even the most illiterate speakers defer as " correct " Welsh, the form they themselves seek to reproduce whenever they deem the situation demands something superior to their own regional dialects. It is the basis of the formal style adopted by educated Welsh speakers for lecturing or appearances on the radio and television. At its most formal, it differs little if at all on the syntactical level from the literary style. The quite wide phonological and phonetic differences between Northern and Southern Welsh do not trouble listeners at all when they listen to this form of Welsh and there is evidence that listeners discount these differences so completely at times as to be unaware of the region of origin of the speaker.

Yet educators grappling with the problem of teaching Welsh as a second language are troubled by the idea that there is no such thing as standard spoken Welsh and that a wide gulf exists between spoken and literary Welsh. They have been led astray partly by the fact that the standard language allows regional phonological and phonetic variations and partly by the prominence of dialect in the speech activity of even educated speakers of Welsh who will quite commonly use dialect as their register when conversing at ease with their friends.

The problem is regarded as so acute in these circles that a panel was formed a few years ago with the declared aim of bridging the gap between literary and oral Welsh and of offering to schools a standard spoken Welsh that would be acceptable to learners and native speakers. The panel has now published some of its results

in two booklets called Cymraeg Byw (Living Welsh) and their supporters have taken up their suggestions enthusiastically. Some of the suggestions are acceptable enough if confined to oral work among learners; but one can only condemn the basic conception that one can sit down to make random selections of forms from several regional dialects and impose them upon a speech community, especially a community like that of Wales possessing a long and vigorous literary tradition, without regard to the reaction of the community.

The enthusiasm of the supporters of Cymraeg Byw has led them to use it as a written medium on the grounds that there should be no differences between the written and spoken varieties of a language and that it is time to bring written Welsh up to date. The latter has been referred to as Cymraeg Marw (Dead Welsh), a curious misnomer, considering the remarkable blossoming of Welsh literature in the so-called Dead Welsh in the present century.

This development is due to a very proper insistence that learners must be taught to *speak* the language, but it could have serious results: (1) It could open a gulf between the Welsh speaker and his literary inheritance for the first time in the history of the language. This is a serious hazard for a threatened language. (2) It could lead to strife between the advocates and the opponents of these developments. (3) It could produce a loss of standards of correctness among native speakers. This is already discernible in the work of those who write the new forms.

Editors of papers intended for children and young people, both learners and native speakers, have taken up this new Welsh with enthusiasm, and any criticism has been met by the assertion that the critics know nothing about teaching others. Recently, however, teachers in areas where the language is strong have begun to voice their opposition in the Welsh press. The new Welsh is so unacceptable to the native-speaking child, they say, that he no longer reads the papers. They give as the main reason that the language is so emasculated that it lacks the necessary colour to make stories written in it interesting. Other teachers complain

that Welsh-speaking children are often at a loss to understand it and the teacher has to transpose it into the traditional literary idiom before they grasp its content.

There seems little danger, however, that it will have a permanent life; resistance to it among educated people and litterateurs has been growing recently and periodicals and newspapers that seemed on the point of changing over to it have drawn back almost entirely into the traditional written style. If the language had been used as a medium of education, this perverted development would never have occurred.

I come now to the efforts being made to stem the decline of the language and to reverse the trend. These are conducted broadly on two fronts:

(1) That of turning the numerical decline of Welsh speakers into a steadily increasing proportion of the total population.

(2) Extending the use of the language to all aspects of the life of the community.

The first aim can only be achieved by processes of education, especially among children. Since 1939, more and more Welsh-medium schools have been established in anglicised areas by groups of parents who have banded together for the purpose. These groups, calling themselves Welsh Schools Parents' Associations, have now joined together into a Union of Welsh Sshools' Parents Associations, which is today the guiding spirit of the movement. It co-ordinates the work of local associations and formulates policy for the future on a national scale.

The policy is to establish a nursery school for children between 2½—5 years of age, taught usually by a retired woman teacher. The schocl may meet several mornings a week. As the children reach five years of age, they enter a Welsh class in some local primary school on the understanding that this is a nucleus of a Welsh school to be housed in its own building when the numbers justify this. The nursery schools are the property of the parents who

finance themselves and pay for the transport of the children. Their financial sacrifice is often quite considerable. Children from Welsh and English-speaking homes are accepted and in most cases there is a high preponderance of English speakers. The Local Education Authorities were definitely hostile at first and they can still be very unco-operative.

The parents are not satisfied with Welsh primary education only. They now press for adequate higher grade schools and a more liberal supply of Welsh books. Flintshire in the North East has led the way in establishing Welsh schools and now has four higher grade schools. Glamorgan has the only Welsh higher grade school in the South established at Rhydfelen near Cardiff and it proposes to establish another in the west of the county.

The full effect of these schools on the language is not yet apparent, but in the last Census areas showing a definite increase in the number of Welsh speakers among school children were Flintshire and Cardiff, a fact attributable to the presence of Welsh schools in these areas.

These schools can be expected in time to re-impose standards of educated spoken Welsh. At present, the situation is rather confused, as though the teachers have no clear idea of the form they should strive for. All too often they seem prepared to accept anything as long as it is Welsh, so that structures heavily influenced by English, which grate on the ears of older people, are tolerated. On the other hand, side by side with these highly unacceptable forms, the children use others belonging to the most formal style of all.

Although always called Welsh schools, these schools are actually bilingual schools, since English and Welsh are used as media. This is regarded with dissatisfaction by a growing minority, which advocates a monolingual Welsh-speaking community as the goal to aim at, and desires the Welsh schools to be fully Welsh. By monolingual community, they do not mean that individuals should be monoglot, but that the life of the community should be lived in its historical language only. This ideal is unlikely to gain popular

support in the immediate future, but nothing short of this as a long-term policy will give permanent security to the language.

To extend the range of the language is as important as to increase the numerical strength of its speakers. Lack of official recognition has hampered its adaptation to the needs of contemporary life by preventing it from entering every part of the life of the nation. In other words, the range of subjects that could be talked about in Welsh was restricted, a fact that its opponents have claimed was due to an innate lack in the language itself. This disability could only be removed by a methodical extension of the language into more and more fields where it had not been used before, and lists of the necessary terms had to be made available as a first step. The University of Wales, through its Board of Celtic Studies and its Press Board, has done much good work in this direction by calling together panels of experts to prepare such lists and by publishing them. It has recently published booklets of terms on the following subjects: Biology, Physics and Mathematics, Woodwork, Sewing, Embroidery and Laundry, Games and Entertainment, the Theatre. The suggested terms often come in for much criticism, but they do provide a basic, or at least an interim, vocabulary for talking about new subjects in the language, and after that the terminology seems to grow of itself.

Another way in which the University helps is by publishing learned journals in which scholars in various fields can write on their own subject in Welsh.

In 1938, philosophy was felt to be outside the range of the Welsh language, but Welsh philosophers took up the challenge by starting the journal Efrydiau Athronyddol (Philosophical Studies). Today, reviewers of this periodical occasionally recall with surprise that philosophy was once thought difficult to write about in Welsh. In the present decade, scientists in the University were moved to tackle the same problem in connection with the sciences, and they now run a periodical called Y Gwyddonydd (The Scientist). This periodical publishes articles on a wide variety of scientific subjects with a glossary of new terms at the end of each number.

It is the nature of languages to respond to all the demands made upon them by those who speak them; but Welsh people have been so conditioned to the idea that their language is somehow deficient that they still show surprise when the language enters with such grace and apparent ease into yet another field of human activity.

This brings me to the last point I wish to discuss, namely the efforts now being made to secure equality of status for Welsh with English in Wales. This is a growing issue[10] whose origin can be traced to the trial in 1936 of three leaders of the Welsh Nationalist Party, now called Plaid Cymru, for burning R.A.F. buildings in Caernarvonshire. The men insisted that the jury at their trial should be Welsh-speakers and much of their evidence was in Welsh. The trial focussed attention on the dismal legal status of the language, and in 1938, a petition for equality of status of Welsh with English was launched. More than 250,000 signatures had been collected, including those of 30 of the 36 Welsh M.P's., when the outbreak of war brought the work to an end. The result was the Welsh Courts Act of 1942, which deleted the " language Clause " of 1536, and gave a Welshman the right to use Welsh in court if he considered himself at a disadvantage in using English. Everything said in court must be translated into English except what the judge or chairman might consider unnecessary, the court to pay for translators. It reasserted, however, that all records must be kept in English, and finally it allowed a Welshman to take the oath in Welsh without having it translated.

The value of this extraordinary Act was minimal and the " disadvantage " Clause ensured that Welsh remained simply a tolerated language in court, while the payment of translators secured for Welshmen a right already enjoyed by foreigners in Britain.

In the years following this Act, Welsh people became increasingly convinced that the improvement of the legal status of Welsh was essential to its defence. In the 1950s a Carmartheshire miner and his family successfully compelled their local authority to print

[10]Gerald Morgan, *The Dragon's Tongue*, 1966, pp. 64-96.

bilingual rates demand forms by refusing to notice the English forms and suffering repeated confiscation of their furniture.

Their action pointed the way to a new kind of campaign, and may have inspired the next move, from a farmer in the same county, which led to the most important legal case in the history of the language and finally to an Act of Parliament. The farmer was to contest a County Council election in 1961 and on the last day for entering nomination papers he submitted a Welsh translation of the usual English forms. The papers were declared invalid by the returning officer and the other contestant declared elected unopposed. The farmer took the case to the Queen's Bench of the High Court of Justice and the judges ruled that the wording of the County and Borough Election Forms Regulations 1951, para.1., which states " at an election of a county councillor the forms in the first schedule hereto or forms to the like effect shall be used with such modifications as circumstances require " fully justified the plaintiff's use of nomination forms in Welsh.

The judgment was widely greeted in Wales as a triumph, and it did mean that Welsh had been acknowledged by the courts as something different from Chinese or Arabic and that its use by a majority in a given area gave it at least some legal status.

In 1963, a Committee, known as the Hughes-Parry Committee[11] was appointed by the Government to inquire into the legal status of Welsh. This Committee produced its Report in 1965, recommending equal validity for Welsh with English, not full equality as Welsh-speakers had hoped. The Government responded in June 1967 with an act entitled " An Act to make further provision with respect to the Welsh Language and references in Acts of Parliament to Wales. "

By this Act, a Welshman is permitted to speak Welsh in court, subject to prior notice being given in any court other than magistrates' courts and the necessary provision for interpretation is authorized. Further, a Welsh or bilingual version of official

[11]It took its name from that of the Chairman, Sir David Hughes Parry, Q.C., Ll·D., D.C.L.

documents or forms may also be ordered by the appropriate Minister, but the power to make such an order is exercisable by statutory instrument, which shall be laid before Parliament.

The Act has been strongly criticized in Wales as being more retrograde than progressive. It does not remove the necessity to keep records of courts in English, and while it removes the obligation to prove disadvantage, it adds the disability of prior notice. At present, Welsh can be spoken in any court *without* prior notice in cases of disadvantage.

On the night the bill was presented, the Secretary of State for Wales specified that orders for translation of documents would be made according to the demand. This has increased rather than allayed Welsh suspicions that the Act was framed with an eye to delaying full recognition of the language and checking the growing demand for official forms and documents in Welsh; for it is recalled that the demand for the recently issued Motor Licence Renewal Forms in Welsh was successful only after a civil disobedience campaign during which a number of members of the Welsh Language Society had served prison sentences for refusing to licence their cars until they could do so on Welsh form. Is this to be the the pattern for the future, people want to know, and when the Welsh version becomes available will it be subjected to disabilities that do not apply to the English version[12] as with the Motor Licence form ?

Concern is also felt because the Act, while giving no rights to the citizen, puts the initiative into the hands of government ministers, to provide Welsh versions or not as they see fit. Little faith is felt in the goodwill of ministers towards the language and the declared hostility of the Postmaster-General does not augur well for the future working of this provision.

The spearhead of the campaign for official recognition of the language is Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (The Welsh Language

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[12]The Welsh version of the Motor Licence Form can only be accepted at the Motor Taxation Offices of the appropriate Local Authority, unlike the English form, which can be handed in at Local Post Offices.

Society), a movement founded in the summer of 1962 by a group of young nationalists. It derived its inspiration from a remarkable radio speech on the fate of the language delivered in the previous February by Mr. Saunders Lewis, former president of Plaid Cymru. In it, the author mercilessly condemned Welsh servility in the matter of the language, and claimed that it could be saved by making the business of local and central government impossible without it. This was work for a movement in the area where Welsh is daily use, demanding forms in Welsh and moving step by step, giving warnings and allowing time for changes.

The Society took up the challenge and began a campaign of civil disobedience on behalf of the language, starting with a demand for summonses in Welsh. Success has been partial, for summonses are forthcoming on request in some cases, but not in others. Among other things, the Society has since demanded the right to register a child's birth in Welsh,[13] bilingual motor licence forms, motor discs, wireless and television licences and members are exhorted to make use of the language on every occasion, official and unofficial.

When members appear before the courts, they receive scant sympathy on the whole, the view of magistrates being that their business is not to inquire into the moral issues involved but simply to give judgment on the admitted breach of the law. Recently, however, some magistrates[14] have acknowledged the real issue by giving absolute discharge to Society members who have appeared before them. This is an important development and could have far-reaching repercussions.

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[13] It is not easy to get figures, but over 50 children are said at the time of writing, to be unregistered.

[14] Those at Neath, Glamorgan, and at Dolgellau, Meirioneth, and most important of all at Bangor last November, when Bangor magistrates gave an absolute discharge to a college lecturer and a Presbyterian Minister for declining to pay for their wireless licences until Welsh versions were available. The Chairman criticised the Postmaster-General for disregarding the new Welsh Language Act.

It would be a bold person who would predict the fate of the language; the forces working against it are still strong. But those on its side are no longer negligible and not least among its assets is the growing venturousness of Welsh speakers as reflected in their readiness to fall foul of the law on its behalf and the fact that they no longer think in terms of defence but of attack. There is, in addition, considerable latent sympathy for the language among those who have lost it. In spite of the huge leeway to be made up before the language is safe, therefore, few really doubt any more that it will be saved.

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